

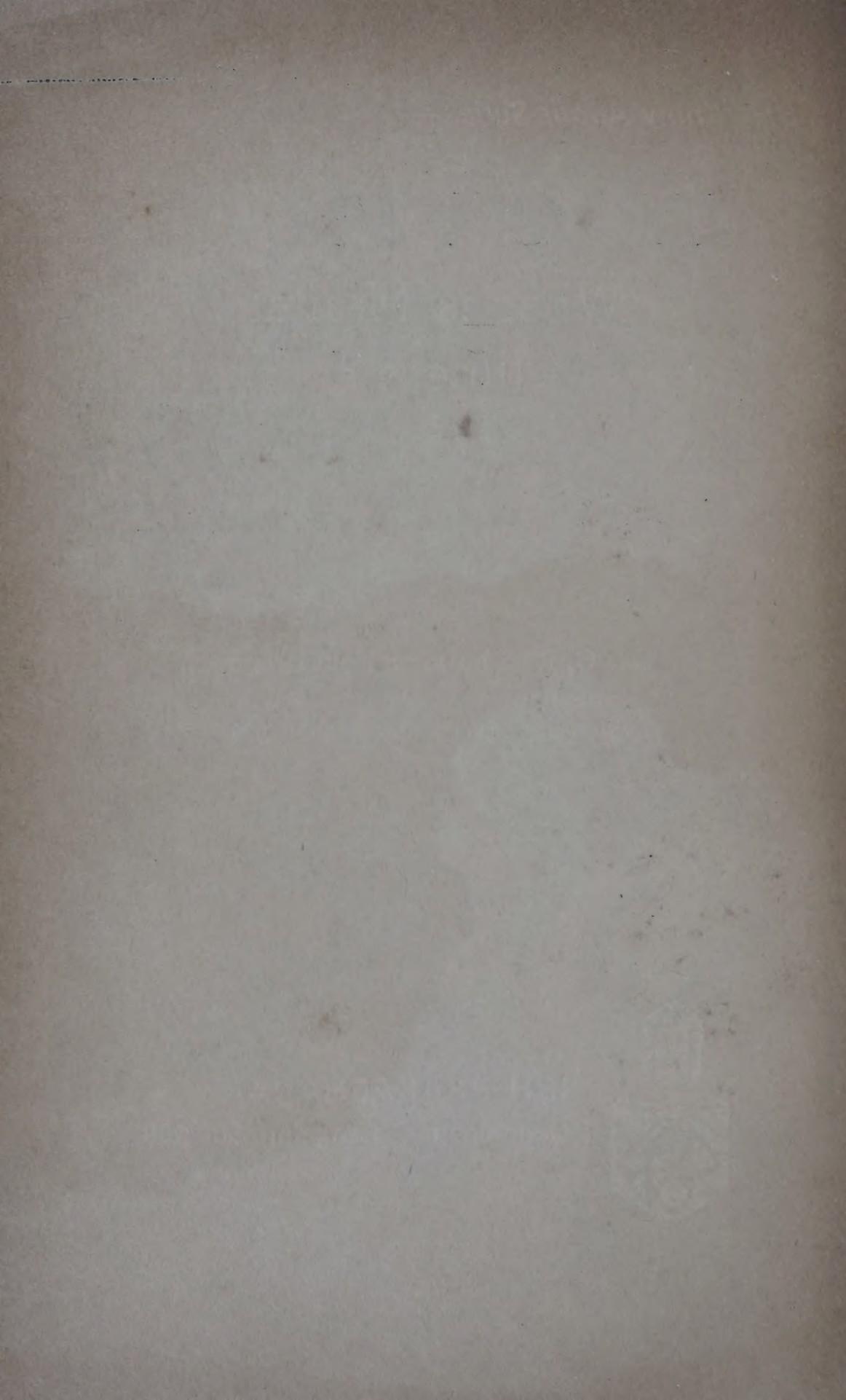
**IBH** know about series —

# what is mental illness?

Dr. C.R. Chandra Shekhar, M.D.

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BH Know About Series—1

# What is Mental Illness ?

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# **WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS ?**

## **What is mental illness ?**

When a person's talk and behaviour become unusual, we suspect that he/she is mentally ill. Too little or too much talk, strange and un-believable ideas and beliefs, un-understandable, irrelevant speech, excess and peculiar behaviour, inappropriate and irrelevant emotional expressions, unsteady mind, poor memory, impaired intelligence, inability to take proper decisions, severe neglect of food, clothes, personal hygiene—all are symptoms of severe mental illness. Inspite of these symptoms, the patient may not know that he is ill.

Mental illness can be mild also. Then the person may look apparently normal or may appear to have some physical illness. Person knows that he is not all right and needs some treatment. He suffers from symptoms like vague fear, sadness, lack of concentration, inability to cope with the situation or work, poor sleep and appetite, some bodily symptoms like aches and pains, shaking of the limbs etc. Usually the patient as well as his friends and relatives do not know that these symptoms are due to mild mental illness.

## **What is the cause ?**

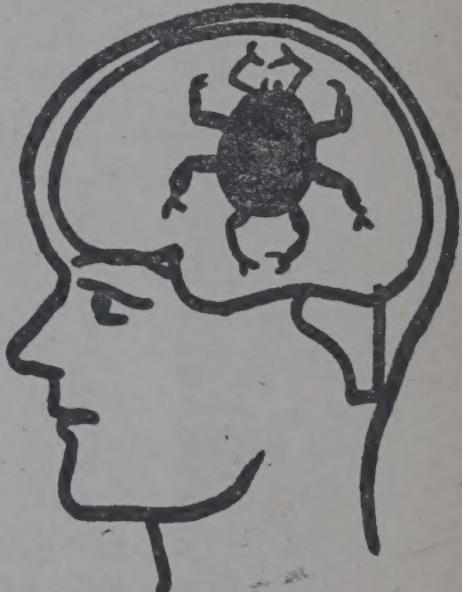
There are many causes for mental illness. Presence of one single factor does not lead to illness. More than one factor are necessary for the manifestation of mental illness.

### *1. Hereditary factors :*

One parent who is mentally ill transmits 'some disability' to the children. Therefore the children of such parents have more risk to become mentally ill than the children of normal parents. But one should know that there is no rule that all the children of mentally ill should become ill.

### *2. Diseases of the brain and head injuries :*

Many diseases of the brain for ex. Brain fever, pus collection in the brain, improper blood supply to the brain, bleeding inside the brain, brain cancer, degenerative diseases in which the nerve-cells start dying, syphilis, untreated fits, etc., can cause mental illness.



Head injuries which are common now a days because of increasing road accidents, lead to brain damage and subsequently to mental illness.

### *3. Brain damage due to poisonous substances :*

There are many poisonous substances which cause brain damage. These substances either come from outside

or produced within the body. People who work with lead, mercury, manganese or people who inhale carbon-monoxide are liable to develop brain damage. People who take lot of alcohol and other intoxicating drugs like Barbiturates (Sleeping tabs), Ganja, Morphine, Pethidine, L.S.D. Dexedrine develop mental illness.

In many physical illnesses like liver and kidney failure, untreated diabetes and hypertension (High B.P.), low or excess secretion of hormones like thyroid, adrenal, brain damage occurs.

#### 4. Poor Nutrition :

Proteins, Vitamins and Minerals are necessary for the health of the brain. Deficiency of these items in our food can lead to brain damage. Lack of Vit B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>5</sub>, B<sub>6</sub>, B<sub>12</sub> lead to severe types of mental illness. Severe malnutrition of the pregnant woman and the child lead to mental retardation.

#### 5. Environmental factors :

Any person who is subjected to severe stress and strain for a long time can develop mental illness. Severe



financial upsets, loss of loved ones either by separation or death, continuous misunderstandings and quarrels with others, repeated frustrations, lack of love and affection, unemployment, lack of satisfaction, etc., can cause mental illness.

## **Who develops mental illness ?**

Any body can become mentally ill. But children teenagers, old people and women compared to men are more prone to develop mental illness.

## **Different Types of Mental Illness**

### **A : Mild Mental Illnesses :**

1. Anxiety Neurosis : Symptoms are vague fear, increased heart beat, poor concentration, poor sleep, etc.



2. Depressive Neurosis : Symptoms are sadness, lack of interest in every thing, sleeplessness suicidal ideas, body aches, weakness, loss of appetite etc.
3. Hysteria : Aches and pains, burning sensation, numbness, abnormal movements of the limbs/ inability to move the limbs, unconscious attacks etc.
4. Obsessive-compulsive Neurosis : Repeatedly getting some silly ideas or desire to do some silly acts which cannot be stopped by will.
5. Phobia : Unusual and excess fear to certain objects like darkness, height, crowd, animals, etc.
5. Sexual Disorders : Many commonly seen sexual disorders are psychogenic and are associated with anxiety or depression. Ex : Impotence, premature ejaculation, Lack of desire in sex.
7. Personality disorders : Some people are very suspicious, some are excessively meticulous, some are more aggressive, some are very selfish and some are totally dependent on others.
8. Psychosomatic illness : Some times long term psychological problems can either cause some physical illnesses or increase their severity. Ex. Peptic ulcer, high blood pressure, asthma, some skin diseases etc.

**B. Severe Mental Illnesses :**

1. Schizophrenia : In this illness, talk and behaviour become unusual and un-understandable. Peculiar experiences like hearing voices, seeing figures when there are none in the surroundings, strange beliefs are present. These patients neglect their food, clothes and personal hygiene and at times

may become violent. They cannot express proper emotions.

2. **Manic—Depressive Psychosis:** In this illness, for some period, the person speaks excessively, boasts that he is a big man when he is not so, remains unusually happy or irritable and over-active. Later he becomes sad for no reason, dull and inactive, expresses desire to die, lacks interest in every thing including food and dress. This lasts for some time. In between these episodes he remains normal.
3. **Reactive Psychosis:** Following certain emotional events like loss or death or quarrel, the person develops severe mental illness.
4. **Organic Psychosis:** Brain damage due to any reason can cause mental illness where in the person becomes confused, acts funny, forgets things and remains disabled.

#### **C. Drug Addiction :**

Many substances like alcohol, ganja, morphine, pethidine, L.S.D., initially give pleasure but later makes the individual to become an addict to them. The person has to increase the dose of these drugs to get the same pleasure and finally he cannot live without them. If he does not take them, he becomes restless, develops severe pain in the muscles and feels miserable. He becomes ready to do any thing, any crime to get these drugs and becomes dangerous to self and to others.

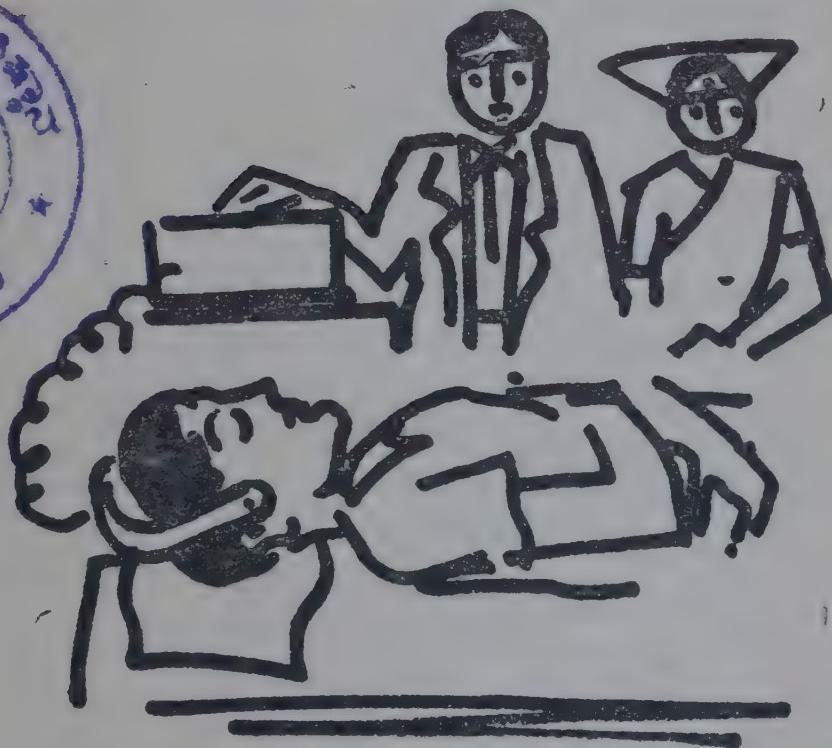
#### **What is the treatment ?**

Mental illnesses are treatable. There are many modes of treatment.

1. **Drugs:** A number of drugs are available in the form of tablets and injections. These drugs are to

be taken regularly and for a long time (couple of months to couple of years) according to the advice of the doctor. In some persons, these drugs produce some side-effects like dryness of the mouth, stiffness of the hands, giddiness, spasms of the muscles etc. Then doctor has to be consulted. No change in the dose of the drugs should be made without consulting the doctor.

2. Shock Treatment (Electro convulsive Treatment)  
Shock treatment is a safe and effective treatment



in severe depression and certain types of schizophrenia. Generally it is given three times a week and totally 5-10 shocks are given.

3. Psychotherapy : Whenever environmental factors are the cause of mental illness, these issues have to be identified and discussed. With the

help of the patient and related others, a feasible solution has to be worked out. This is done by talking to all people concerned and organizing them to solve these issues. This is psychotherapy. It is a treatment of choice in mild types of mental illness.

When psychotherapy is given to individual alone to help him to re-organize himself it is called individual psychotherapy. When family members are involved, it is called family psychotherapy. When many individual patients are given psychotherapy in a group, it is called group psychotherapy.

In psychotherapy, the individual is encouraged to speak out his problems, difficulties, desires, frustrations, feelings and experiences so that he can modify them to suit his environment and abilities.

4. Behaviour Therapy : According to behaviour therapists, mental illness is, a person either exhibiting, un-wanted and wrong thoughts and behaviour or not exhibiting right and wanted thoughts and behaviours. Therefore treatment would be to make him learn good behaviour or unlearn the bad ones. This is behaviour therapy.

### **Rehabilitation :**

Once the patient starts improving, it is very essential and useful to make him to do some work. By doing so, it is observed that patients recover fast and do not become ill again. By doing work, they are usefully occupied, earn money and cease to be a burden for their family. In the beginning let them do small household work like cleaning, bringing water, washing the

utensils, etc. Later they can take up other work which they like. Even severely ill patients with treatment and proper training can be employed usefully in some simple job.

### **What you should do ?**

If you suspect a person whom you know to be mentally ill

1. Make him to consult a psychiatrist (or bring him) as early as possible ; earlier the better.
2. Make him to take treatment regularly, attend to his/her daily requirements like food, hygiene.
3. See that he/she is rehabilitated soon.
4. Understand his/her deficits and be kind.

### **What you should not do ?**

1. Don't hide the illness
2. Don't make fun of the patient, don't redicule him
3. Don't reject and neglect him
4. Don't ill-treat him, don't subject him to painful, unscientific and blind treatment methods like beating, branding, locking in a room, starving, etc.

### **How to manage an excited and violent patient ?**

At times, a severely ill patient may become extremely irritable, restless and violent. He may start destroying his or others property, may threaten to injure himself or others. He may become a nuisance and unmanageable. It might become very difficult to take him to the hospital.

In such a situation, get a doctor. Throw a blanket on the patient. Hold him tightly with the help of three or four people. Make the doctor to give a sedative injection

(Chlorpromazine 100 mg I.M.) use thick cloth to tie the limbs. Don't use rope which hurts the patient. Injunction can be repeated. When he becomes droway, take him to the hospital.

### **Do you know that mental illnesses are preventable?**

It is heartening to note that mental illnesses are preventable to some extent. Note the following :

- \* If there is already a mental patient in your family, when you want to get married, marry a person from a healthy family (family which does not have mentally ill person).
- \* Maintain your health by taking good food and exercise.
- \* Develop regular habits as far as your daily life is concerned. Don't go for extremes.
- \* Avoid head injuries.
- \* Consult a reliable and good doctor and take proper treatment for any type of illness as early as possible.
- \* Know your assets and liabilities and plan your activities and life within your resources.
- \* Have regular recreational activities.
- \* Keep away from intoxicating drugs.
- \* Have good friends with whom you can share your happiness and difficulties.
- \* Lead a content life and work for some achievable ideal goals.

### **Mental illness in children**

Many do not know that children can also suffer from mental illness. They need love and affection, encouragement and support, disciplining and punishment in

appropriate doses and in appropriate manner. They need good nourishment, training and education. If these needs are not met with, they become mentally unhealthy which is manifested in different ways like,

1. Bed Wetting : The child may pass urine in clothes or in bed.
2. Thumb sucking, nail biting.
3. Disturbances of eating : either eating less or more ; refusing to eat certain items.
4. Disturbances of sleep : poor sleep, night terrors, sleep walking.
5. Speech, reading and learning difficulties : the child may not be able to talk properly, ex. Stammering. It may have difficulty to identify certain alphabets like b and d or p and q. It may be slow in learning.
6. Refusal to go to school/truancy.
7. Educational backwardness : Poor in studies inspite of being intelligent.
8. Disturbances of emotions : displaying excess sadness, anger, fear, jealousy, aggression, shyness.
9. Disturbances of behavior : lying, stealing, destroying things, violence, masturbation, sexual crimes, excess mischievousness, disobedience, temper tantrums.
10. Psycho-Somatic Symptoms : recurrent pain in the abdomen, headaches, diarrhea etc.

### Treatment includes

- a) Counselling the parents and teachers.
- b) Training and educating the child.
- c) Bringing necessary changes in the environment.

## **Mental illness**

### **MISCONCEPTS**

- 1. Mental illness is hereditary.**
- 2. Mental illness is due to evil spirits/God's curse/black magic/bad deeds of past life.**
- 3. Masturbation, seminal loss, excess sexual activity cause mental illness.**
- 4. Mental illness is only one type. All patients are same.**
- 5. Mental patients are always dangerous.**
- 6. Mental illness is contagious.**
- 7. Mental illness is incurable.**
- 8. There is no medicine for mental illness.**
- 9. Beating, branding, fasting, black magic, exorcism are helpful.**
- 10. Marriage can cure mental illness.**
- 11. Mentally ill cannot do any work. Once ill, life long they are dependant on others.**
- 12. Permanent hospitalization is only way to manage mentally ill.**

## **Mental illness**

### **CORRECT CONCEPTS**

1. Compared to children of normal parents, children of mentally ill, have more risk to become ill.
2. Mental illnesses are due to biochemical defects in brain, brain diseases, brain damage, environmental stress and strain.
3. No.
4. Mental illness are of different types. Some are mild and some are severe.
5. Only at times, a few patients are dangerous.
6. It is not contagious.
7. Majority of them are curable. All are treatable.
8. There is medicine for mental illness. Drugs in the form of tablets, injections are available.
9. They are not helpful. Infact they are harmful as they cause much pain and distress to the patient.
10. No, marriage is not a solution for mental illness.
11. Mentally ill can do work and become independent provided proper training and encouragement are given to them.
12. Permanent hospitalization is harmful and unnecessary. Managing the patient at home is beneficial in many ways.

## **Free mental health facilities available in Karnataka Bangalore**

- (1) National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS)
- (2) Psychiatric Unit, Victoria Hospital.
- (3) Mental Health Centre, (Urban Unit of Community Psychiatry, NIMHANS) K. C. General Hospital, Malleswaram.
- (4) Rural Mental Health Centre, (Rural Unit of Community Psychiatry, NIMHANS) Sakalavara village (near Bannerugatta)

### **Mysore**

Psychiatric Unit, K. R. Hospital.

### **Mangalore**

Psychiatric Unit, Govt. Wenlock Hospital.

### **Hassan**

Psychiatric Unit, Sri Chamarajendra Hospital.

### **Dharwad**

Government Mental Hospital.

### **Shimoga**

Psychiatric Unit, Mcghan Hospital.

### **Davanagere**

Psychiatric Unit, General Hospital.

### **Bellary**

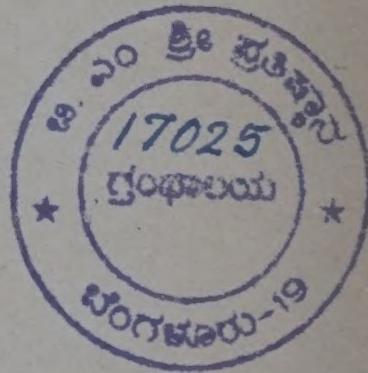
Department of Psychiatry, Medical College Hospital.

### **Belgaum**

Psychiatric Unit, General Hospital.

### **Gulbarga**

Psychiatric Unit, Medical College Hospital etc.





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